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THE REPORT OF THE SPECIAL EDUCATION ACTION TEAMS

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THE BOARD OF EDUCATION
FOR THE CITY OF HAMILTON

February 27, 1992

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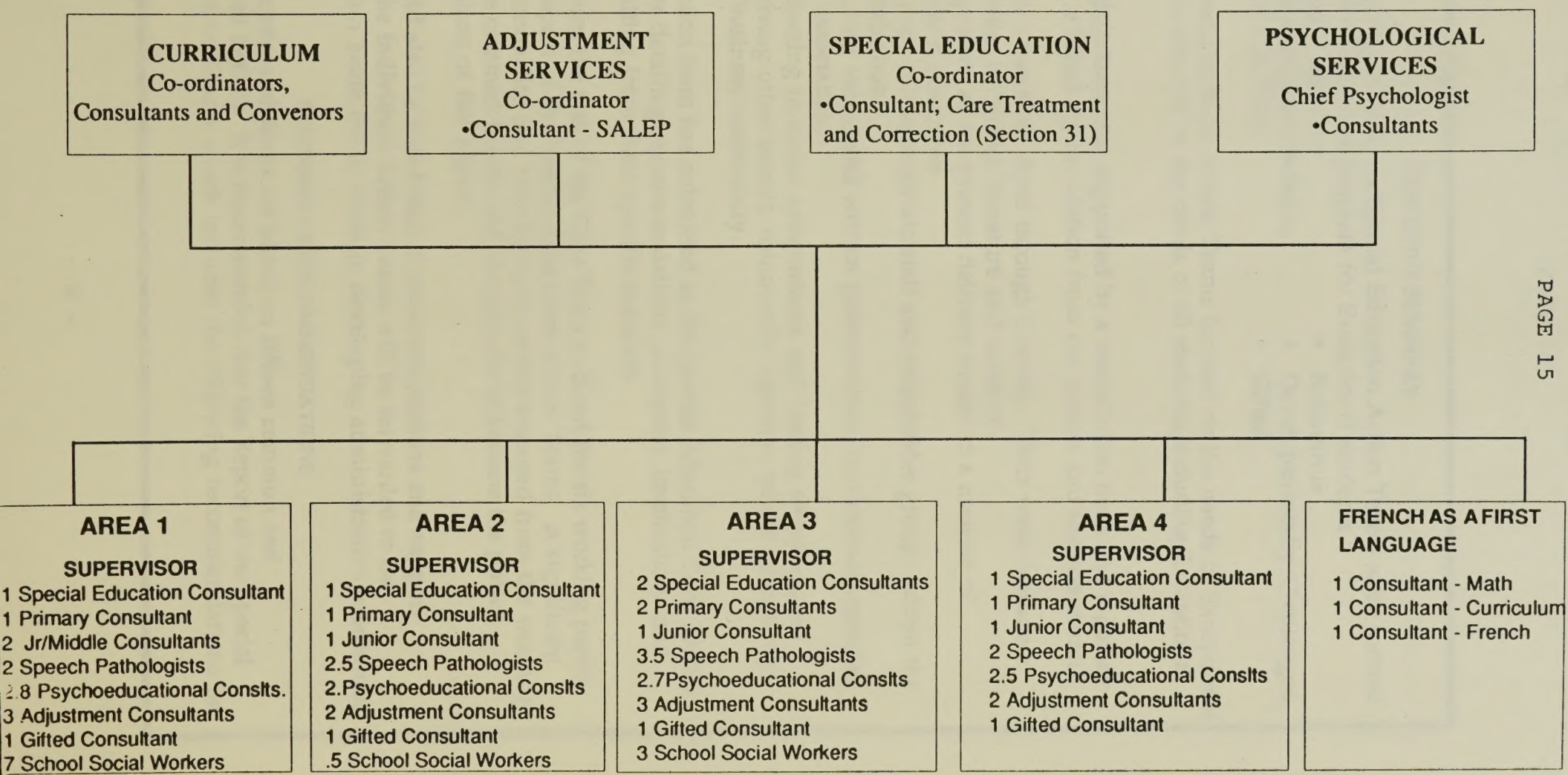
Delivery of Program
Through System and Area Program Support Staff



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In the spring of 1991, six Special Education Action Teams were formed to examine issues related to program for Exceptional students

- Program Delivery
- Student Support Services
- D.A.R.T./I.P.R.C.
- Behaviour
- Developmentally Challenged
- Gifted

While some of these Action Teams focused on the needs of Exceptional students, others focused on the needs of all students including Exceptional students.

Each action team was supported by a consultation team and together they involved a broad representation from the system and the community.

The teams met from April through October. Their work included:

- a review of current literature and research
- comparison of the present delivery model to a number of boards of education
- meeting with appropriate staff and stakeholder groups within the organization
- receiving verbal and written presentations from outside agencies and associations
- conducting in-house symposiums and hosting symposiums involving other boards, community agencies, parent groups and the business community.

Each action team has submitted to the Special Education Core Team a working paper detailing recommendations, rationales, implications and timelines resulting from their specific mandate.

It has been the task of the Core Team to blend the six working papers into a Final Report of the Special Education Action Teams. A significant degree of commonality and interdependence has emerged from the working papers. These common beliefs and elements have become the **policy** recommendations of this report.

It should also be noted that all recommendations and support materials of the individual Action Teams will be forwarded to the Implementation Team for its work in developing administrative procedures.

SUMMARY OF RECOMMENDATIONS

Our recommendations are based on fifteen common and interdependent beliefs. It is recommended that the Report of the Special Education Action Teams which includes the following recommendations be approved.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1) **CONCEPT OF NEIGHBOURHOOD SCHOOL**

The needs of all students including Exceptional students should be met wherever possible in their neighbourhood school.

2) **IMPORTANCE OF THE CLASSROOM TEACHER**

Resources to support program delivery to all students including Exceptional students must continue to be applied at the school and within the classroom.

3) **PROVISION OF RANGE OF PROGRAMS**

It is essential that a range of programs be provided given the unique and varying needs of the student population.

4) **CONCEPT OF D.A.R.T. PROCESS**

The school Diagnostic & Resource Team must function through a problem solving process which enables the school to access resources for individual students.

5) **VIEW OF EDUCATION AS A PARTNERSHIP**

Parents must be viewed, and be encouraged to view themselves, as contributing and worthwhile members of the school team attempting to provide the best possible level of service and communication on behalf of each individual student.

Moreover, it is seen as essential that there be increased coordination between the school and the community at large.

6) **D.A.R.T. PROCESS COORDINATION**

A person must be identified to coordinate the information and services concerning each student involved in the D.A.R.T. process.

7) **BALANCING SCHOOL AUTONOMY AND SYSTEM UNIFORMITY**

There is a clearly identified need to establish system expectations that will provide a framework for program & service delivery responsibility within the areas and schools.

8) **PROVISION OF COORDINATING FUNCTIONS**

There is a need to coordinate the special education and services functions at the system level with the special education and services functions at the area and school levels.

9) **IMPORTANCE OF THE STUDENTS' SOCIAL-EMOTIONAL NEEDS**

Social emotional needs for all students, including Exceptional students, must be addressed through curriculum review, development and implementation.

10) **IMPORTANCE OF A CUMULATIVE RECORD OF STUDENT INFORMATION**

A cumulative profile of student information will be compiled through the effective tracking of interventions and student strengths and needs.

11) **REVIEW OF ASSESSMENT PROCESSES**

A review of our existing assessment processes within the full range of Exceptionalities must be conducted.

12) **NECESSITY OF REDEFINING ROLES AND FUNCTIONS**

A clear definition of the roles and functions of support staff must be developed as a result of the restructuring of program delivery.

13) **IMPORTANCE OF STAFF DEVELOPMENT**

Staff development and inservice must be a priority to support the restructuring of program delivery.

14) **IMPORTANCE OF PROGRAM ACCOUNTABILITY**

An evaluative process within the framework of program accountability must be developed to ensure improved student learning outcomes.

15) **NECESSITY OF EFFECTIVE COMMUNICATION**

As a system we must undertake an active role to increase school and community awareness and understanding of this philosophy and these belief statements.

CONCEPT OF NEIGHBOURHOOD SCHOOL

1) The needs of all students including Exceptional students should be met wherever possible in their neighbourhood school.

Rationale:

This allows students to remain in their own community in order to establish an identity and social relationships with other students. Students transported outside their neighbourhood school area can experience social isolation in their community. Societal trends, research, parent and advocacy groups and recent political decisions strongly support the neighbourhood school concept.

Implications:

- In order for the neighbourhood school to fulfill this mandate the Consultative-Collaborative Model to problem solving must be used.

  Components of the Consultative-Collaborative Model include the following:

  i) use of descriptions of needs to reduce labelling of students
  ii) an indirect service bias
  iii) heightened use of systemic intervention
  iv) professional development at all levels
  v) a pivotal role of the in-school resource teacher
  vi) sufficient resources to provide support to the classroom teacher
  vii) increased home-school partnership in problem solving
  viii) increased use of data and curriculum-based assessments
  ix) in-school resource group-Principal/Vice-Principal, L.R.T., G.L.R.T., Teacher, Parent
  x) community resources where applicable.

- An acceptance of responsibility for each student by the student's neighbourhood school. Linkages will be maintained and the goal for students in System or Area self-contained classes will be to return to the neighbourhood school.

- When resources are provided within the neighbourhood school to support the classroom teacher, then a reduction in the number of self-contained classes should occur. The redeployment of staff (Teachers & Educational Assistants) through reduction of self-contained classes to ensure sufficient resources can occur. Parents must be involved in the consultation process through the Annual I.P.R.C Review before student placement from self-contained to regular class occur.

Cost Implications:

Inservice within existing time and resources to inservice all staff on the Consultative-Collaborative Model and the roles and responsibilities involved.

Cost savings - Transportation - Once

Timelines:

Begin Implementation 1992-93 school year.

IMPORTANCE OF THE CLASSROOM TEACHER

2) Resources to support program delivery to all students including Exceptional students must continue to be applied at the school and within the classroom.

Rationale:

Research indicates that assistance provided for learning disabled students in an integrated setting is more effective than assistance provided in isolation (withdrawal).

The classroom teacher supported by appropriate resources is clearly the prime deliverer of program to students. In order for this to be accomplished it is critical that resources be applied at the school and in the classroom.

Implications:

- There will be a shift away from withdrawal and emphasis on program integration within the classroom. When students are withdrawn there should be coordination between the withdrawal program and the regular classroom program.
- Professional resource support will continue to be required at the classroom level.
- Teachers will use the D.A.R.T. for consultation concerning program modification and teaching/learning strategies for all students with special needs.

Cost Implications:

Redeployment of existing staff and cooperation with local Agencies and Ministries.

Timelines:

Begin Implementation 1992-93 school year.

PROVISION OF RANGE OF PROGRAMS

3) It is essential that a range of programs be provided given the unique and varying needs of the student population.

Rationale:

A wide range of needs requires a range of programs and services for all students. There must continue to be appropriate opportunities, from total integration to self-contained programs, within this continuum of services from J.K. - Grade 12/O.A.C.

At all levels the program emphasis should be on integrating students wherever and whenever possible.

Schools should endeavour to provide comprehensive programs aimed at long term goals.

Implications:

- Each Area should have a full complement of self-contained programs (G.L.D.,S.L.D., Gifted, Speech/Language, Behaviour).
- All schools to have access to system programs (Orthopaedic, Vision, Hearing Impaired, Developmentally Challenged, Multiple, Autistic, Assessment).
- Support staff in each Area will require specialized training in Gifted, Behaviour and Developmentally Challenged programming.

Cost Implications:

Corresponding savings to be noted in reduced number of self-contained classes thus teachers and E.A.'s will be available for redeployment. There will be a corresponding reduction in transportation costs.

Timelines:

Begin Implementation 1992-93 school year.

CONCEPT OF D.A.R.T. PROCESS

4) The school Diagnostic & Resource Team must function through a problem solving process which enables the school to access resources for individual students.

Rationale:

The D.A.R.T. must be available to all students, including Exceptional students. The D.A.R.T. process must address student needs in terms of program recommendations and program verification.

Implications:

- This process should include:
  - i) parental involvement when individual student is presented
  - ii) student involvement where appropriate
  - iii) accurate records indicating recommended strategies, evaluation components, and review dates
  - iv) submission of a D.A.R.T. plan to the Superintendent of Schools consistent with the guiding principles outlined in "D.A.R.T. - the Team Problem Solving Process"
  - v) staff development relative to the implementation of the D.A.R.T.
  - vi) identification of inservice needs for staff
  - vii) identification of a case manager.

- This is not to suggest that each school will have an identical D.A.R.T. process, rather it is an adherence to the concept that certain elements are critical regardless of the size and nature of the school if the D.A.R.T. process is to be effective.

- Forms need to be standardized.
  D.A.R.T. documentation needs to be specific, accurate and available.
  The comfort level of parents at D.A.R.T. meetings needs to be addressed as well as sensitivity to use of educational language. Parents should be able to request a D.A.R.T.

- Community involvement at all levels of D.A.R.T. meetings is to be encouraged.

Cost Implications:

To be accomplished within existing resources.

Timelines:

Begin Implementation 1992-93 school year.

VIEW OF EDUCATION AS A PARTNERSHIP

5) **Parents must be viewed, and be encouraged to view themselves, as contributing and worthwhile members of the school team attempting to provide the best possible level of service and communication on behalf of each individual student.**

Moreover, it is seen as essential that there be increased coordination between the school and the community at large.

Rationale:

Parents of students from J.K. - Grade 12/O.A.C. should be encouraged to share valuable information as equal members in the team approach to problem-solving. As partners in the development of an optimum program for their child they will gain insights into rationale behind the individual educational plan & more fully support its implementation and evaluation.

Because of increasing societal changes, community services should be approached to access the neighbourhood school to provide service beyond normal school hours.

This linkage would facilitate cooperative problem solving of behavioural issues in the neighbourhood school.

Research has shown that home involvement in behaviour management can contribute significantly to successful outcomes.

Implications:

- Parents should be involved from earliest stages of need and be made aware of the importance of their role in their child's development.

- A public relations brochure should be updated and distributed for the community highlighting Special Services and Programs offered by the Hamilton Board of Education. It should include D.A.R.T. and I.P.R.C. information. Video format should also be developed and available in a variety of languages.

Timelines:

Fall, 1992 & Spring, 1993.

- The principal should strive to obtain translators/interpreters for non-English speaking parents from a centrally coordinated pool of qualified personnel.

- A less intimidating atmosphere should be created for parents and staff by having IPRC meetings held in the home school setting, where possible and appropriate.

- Community programs should be encouraged to access neighbourhood schools.

- A process for linkage between schools and other community agencies and resources (businesses, industries, post-secondary institutions) needs to be developed. This includes use of a city wide integrated data base and appropriate research.

Timelines:

Phase II of Integrated Student Information Plan.

Cost Implications:

Development and production of parent brochures. To be taken from 1992 budget allocation.

D.A.R.T. PROCESS COORDINATION

6) A person must be identified to coordinate the information and services concerning each student involved in the D.A.R.T. process.

Rationale:

A person in the most strategic position to coordinate services and information concerning a student should be identified when a student is first presented to a D.A.R.T. This person would have responsibility to coordinate, to communicate on an ongoing basis, to facilitate tracking and to advocate on behalf of the student.

This is intended to avoid duplication of effort both within our system and the community at large. The person designated need not, in all circumstances, be school or board personnel.

Implications:

- The principal/vice-principal would play a key role ensuring equitable and manageable case loads for coordination of the D.A.R.T. process and information.
- The concept of team between home, school & community should be enhanced.
- The designated person will manage transitions from:
  i) home or daycare to kindergarten
  ii) junior to middle school
  iii) middle school to secondary school
  iv) secondary to post secondary
  v) secondary to community
- The appointment of a designated person at each transition time should take place through the D.A.R.T./I.P.R.C. process.

Cost Implications:

To be accomplished within existing resources.

Timelines:

Begin Implementation 1992-93 school year.

BALANCING SCHOOL AUTONOMY AND SYSTEM UNIFORMITY

7) There is a clearly identified need to establish system expectations that will provide a framework for program & service delivery responsibility within the areas and schools.

Rationale:

Schools and areas have different needs. Schools and areas therefore must have the flexibility to address these needs within a framework of standards and expectations for program, resources, tracking and procedures that would provide equity across the system.

Implications:

- Standardize forms, terminology and procedures at the elementary and secondary level for:
  i) D.A.R.T.'s
  ii) I.P.R.C.'s
  iii) I.P.P.'s
  iv) Annual Reviews

- Transitions based on transfers or promotions of exceptional pupils must be attended to by the sending school which should initiate contact with the receiving school to share information and recommendations. A new person may need to be designated to coordinate the D.A.R.T. process at this time.

- Every school plan should include procedures for program modification & accountability which reflect individual needs and characteristics of students. As well, a behaviour management component should be included which addresses both proactive and reactive measures.

Cost Implications:

To be accomplished within existing resources.

Timelines:

Begin Implementation 1992-93 school year.

PROVISION OF COORDINATING FUNCTIONS

8) There is a need to coordinate the special education and services functions at the system level with the special education and services functions at the area and school levels.

Rationale:

A coordinating function which ensures system equity and supports area deployment of resources (human, material and plant) should be developed and implemented.

The unique needs of schools and areas must be acknowledged and addressed. Equitable distribution of resources based upon need must be ensured.

Implications:

- Re-organization within the Program Department and area teams to ensure balance and equity and to coordinate, support and develop plans for:
  i) gifted education
  ii) developmentally challenged
  iii) a behaviour management policy
  iv) system I.P.R.C.'s
  v) a linkage with the various community services to pursue an integrated service model where the school is the hub.

Cost Implications:

To be accomplished within existing resources.

Timelines:

Begin Implementation 1992-93 school year.

IMPORTANCE OF THE STUDENTS' SOCIAL-EMOTIONAL NEEDS

9) Social emotional needs for all students, including Exceptional students, must be addressed through curriculum review, development and implementation.

Rationale:

In addition to the cognitive and effective domains, there is a clear recognition that the social emotional needs of students must be viewed as a significant priority. In so doing, it is recognized that curriculum for all youngsters, including special needs students, is not simply a matter of what is to be taught, but also how it is to be taught.

Implications:

- Teaching methods must be geared to all learning styles. As new curricula are developed strategies which address different learning styles must be included.
- Program modification is most effectively developed by a team. Program modification must be developed, implemented and evaluated using the Consultative-Collaborative Model.
- Design teams should integrate social skills and problem-solving skills into the curriculum.
- School teams should address and provide support for behaviour management in the classroom.
- A curriculum for the Senior Developmentally Challenged must be developed.

  The following elements must be included in the curriculum:
  i) use of community and school environments.
  ii) the provision for out-of-school learning experiences will facilitate students' eventual transition from school to life in the community. (Planning For Independence)
  iii) a planned emphasis on arts, leisure time activities, physical fitness and human sexuality. (Planning For Independence)
  iv) a review of current Peer-Tutoring programs with the development of guidelines and policies that will ensure quality and consistency.

Cost Implications:

To be accomplished within existing resources.

Timelines:

To be reflected in 3 year C.R.D.I. Program Plan

IMPORTANCE OF A CUMULATIVE PROFILE OF STUDENT INFORMATION

10) A cumulative profile of student information will be compiled through the effective tracking of interventions and student strengths and needs.

Rationale:

There is a need to build on the already well founded Early Identification Process. Teacher and parent observation and the effective use of the D.A.R.T. process is critical within this framework. The development of a cumulative record of student information as part of this process is essential in effective programming particularly for special needs students.

Implications:

The early identification of student needs and the effective tracking of students in an accurate and concise manner can be accomplished without unnecessary or premature labelling or without additional and onerous documentation.

Attention must be paid to consistent practices in the accumulation and compilation of information including early identification records, report cards, D.A.R.T. records, pertinent I.P.R.C. information and other O.S.R. documentation file information.

Report cards must include strengths and needs. Successful strategies which have been employed to address specific needs should be identified. The format of the existing report card and needs of staff for inservice on observation, assessment and report card writing needs to be reviewed.

Cost Implications:

To be accomplished within existing resources.

Timelines:

Begin Implementation 1992-93 school year.

REVIEW OF ASSESSMENT PROCESSES

11) A review of our existing assessment processes within the full range of Exceptionalities must be conducted.

Rationale:

Given the emphasis related to developing a cumulative record of information for the individual student, it is viewed that there will be a need to review our existing assessment methods.

To maintain equity in identification and placement in a decentralized System consistent criteria and procedures are required.

It is recognized that there may be strong cultural and socio-economic biases in some of the standardized tests presently used.

There is little consistency in the materials and procedures presently being used to assess Developmentally Challenged students relative to programming needs.

Implications:

Criteria for Identification must be reviewed and a standardized Identification Placement Policy for the System be developed. This will be done within the framework of the Ministry of Education Consultation Paper soon to be released.

A work group must be established to examine and re-evaluate the screening tools, tests, timelines and personnel presently involved in identifying Gifted students, to provide a wider range of data for analysis and to expand the base for referrals.

Through the Program Department and specifically Psychological Services appropriate identification procedures and assessment tools be evaluated, recommended and approved for the Developmentally Challenged.

There may be a need to consider a system or area Special Education Assessment Centre for students as part of the restructuring of program delivery.

Cost Implications:

To be accomplished within existing resources.

Timelines:

Begin Implementation 1992-93 school year.

NECESSITY OF REDEFINING ROLES AND FUNCTIONS

12) A clear definition of the roles and functions of support staff must be developed as a result of the restructuring of program delivery.

Rationale:

The restructuring of program delivery will by necessity result in a shift, refocusing and redefining of the functions of the resource support staff. This is not to suggest that the existing function or the people who fill them are not effective; rather, it is impossible to renew and restructure the curriculum and delivery process without consideration of the resource/support functions. Further, if it is deemed that the most effective delivery model involves the classroom teacher supported by a multi-disciplinary team of resource support staff, then it is essential that an examination of these functions be undertaken. In this context, it will be necessary to clearly define the functions of resource support staff.

Implications:

- Terminology and functions be revised, consistent with the Consultative-Collaborative Model.
- The in-school function of resource teacher be redefined in conjunction with the Consultative-Collaborative Model.
- The function of the classroom teacher needs to be defined in terms of the Consultative-Collaborative Model.
- The function of the school administrators needs to be defined in terms of the Consultative-Collaborative Model.
- Possible impact on collective agreements and therefore for consultation and negotiation with Federations.
- The redeployment of personnel is necessary to increase the resource personnel in the school.
- SALEP must be reviewed in order to be better tied to the concept of school/area based delivery.

Cost Implications:

To be accomplished within existing resources.

Timelines:

Begin Implementation 1992-93 school year.

IMPORTANCE OF STAFF DEVELOPMENT

13) Staff development and inservice must be a priority to support the restructuring of program delivery.

Rationale:

In order for all of this to be accomplished, it will be absolutely critical that a strong commitment to Staff Development and inservice be established as a priority. Virtually all of the desired elements cannot be achieved without a system-wide commitment to the importance of teacher and professional support staff training and retraining.

Implications:

- All educational staff will need to be inserviced on the Consultative-Collaborative Model.
- Inservice will be necessary to provide for an effective D.A.R.T./I.P.R.C. process as well as for consistency across the system.
- Inservice must be provided for observation skills, program modification, delivery of program, evaluation, report card writing.
- Inservice must be provided for all staff on current behavioural management practices.
- In-school resource teachers will need ongoing professional development related to strategies, processes and expectations to inservice the school staff.

Cost Implications:

To be accomplished within existing resources.

Timelines:

Begin Implementation 1992-93 school year.

IMPORTANCE OF PROGRAM ACCOUNTABILITY

14) An evaluative process within the framework of program accountability must be developed to ensure improved student learning outcomes.

Rationale:

As with all other elements of Program Development and Implementation, there is a clear recognition for the need for increased accountability in all elements related to Special Education. In essence any intended shift, refocusing or restructuring must be accompanied by some form of evaluative process within the framework of program accountability.

Implications:

- Objectives, methods and measures need to be developed through collaboration with those managing and delivering each program. This includes Gifted, Junior and Senior Developmentally Challenged, and all other programs that require review.
- Measures need to have specific program implications.
- Results must be comprehensible.
- Program evaluation should not be seen as personnel evaluation.

Cost Implications:

To be accomplished within existing resources.

Timelines:

Begin Implementation 1992-93 school year.

NECESSITY OF EFFECTIVE COMMUNICATION

15) As a system we must undertake an active role to increase school and community awareness and understanding of this philosophy and these belief statements.

Rationale:

Effective communication is an integral component of all educational programs. Prompt and precise communication on an ongoing basis is necessary to enhance trust and teamwork in order to meet the individual needs of exceptional students. Such communication should demonstrate sensitivity and should focus on the needs of the student. Attention should be paid to clarity and comprehension. Jargon and acronyms should be used with discretion.

Implications:

- A public relations brochure should be updated and distributed for the community explaining and highlighting the Special Services and Programs offered by the Hamilton Board of Education including D.A.R.T. and I.P.R.C. information. Video format should also be developed and available in a variety of languages.
- A Special Education Manual should be prepared for schools and should include description of programs and administrative procedures.
- The role of the Public Relations Department should be to support school staff in their efforts to increase community awareness and understanding.

Cost Implications:

To be accomplished within existing resources.

Timelines:

Begin Implementation 1992-93 school year.

Appendix A

GLOSSARY OF KEY TERMS INCLUDED IN THE RECOMMENDATIONS

Consultative-Collaborative Model - A delivery model in which support is provided to the classroom teacher who works with all children in the regular classroom. The support for the classroom teacher is provided by the resource teacher(s)/team(s).

D.A.R.T. - Diagnostic And Resource Team which functions as an in-school problem-solving group that focuses on individual student needs by utilizing all available resources.

Direct Inschool Support - Resources both human and material will be applied at the school level with the focus on supporting the classroom teacher.

Exceptional Student - A student whose behavioural, communicational, intellectual, physical or multiple exceptionalities are such that he/she is considered to need placement in a Special Education program by an I.P.R.C. committee.

I.P.R.C. - Identification, Placement and Review Committee.

I.P.P. - Individual Pupil Plan.

Indirect Service Bias - Provision of direct resource support services to the classroom teacher with consultation, shared planning and in-class assistance seen as preferable to withdrawal assistance.

Neighbourhood School - The school that the student would normally attend.

Systemic Intervention - Interventions that are designed to target whole classrooms or groups of students within classrooms.

Wherever Possible - Inclusive unless fiscally impracticable or all possibilities for success in the neighbourhood school have been exhausted.

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